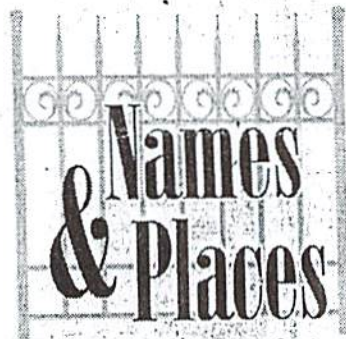


One for the Books

By TONY KELSO

At next month's Annual Town Meeting, Duxbury voters will make a decision on the rejuvenation of the 1909 Wright building, the town's former library. A fact sometimes forgotten is that the Wright building was not the first, but the second, structure to serve as the Duxbury library. The first building was the one that today sits at 178 St. George Street, but which was moved twice before finding its home on St. George Street.

The building originally stood where the western-most driveway into Duxbury High School is today. The land was bought in 1819 from one of the last Delanos to live on their ancestor Philip Delano's original farm. Ezra



"King Caesar" Weston Jr. bought the lot and by September 1820 the house was built in time for the marriage of Weston's son

Gershom Bradford Weston to Judith Sprague. King Caesar's nephew Ezra Weston Sampson also married at that time and both couples – cousins and in the family business of shipbuilding together – began their married lives in this house.

Next to this "honeymoon house" stood the store of the Weston firm. Gershom started his career here in the family firm. By 1824 he had bought his house from his father and in 1830 he bought a small lot on the opposite side of St. George Street, a move that would have far-reaching effects for the town of Duxbury.

In 1840 Gershom built an expensive mansion behind his first house. Today this is the site of Duxbury High School. Ten years later this mansion burned in a spectacular fire and it was found that Weston had not insured it. He rebuilt his dream home, but in the process went broke and lost his new mansion in a foreclosure sale to his brother Alden. The new mansion was later bought by the Wright family in July 1868 and was known as the Wright mansion.

Throughout the stagnation of Duxbury's shipbuilding, decline in the Weston family's fortunes and wide changes from the Civil War, the house and store continued to sit side by side on St. George Street. In the early 1870s, as the Wrights greatly enlarged the former

Weston mansion, they also chose to move buildings. The store was moved to Washington Street and became a house. The "honeymoon house" was moved across the street to the small lot on the edge of an old Alden farm pasture. This then became a guest house for the Wright family and was called "the old house."

In the late 1880s two events moved Duxbury closer to having a public library. On November 3, 1888, the Wrights' oldest son, George, fell down an open elevator shaft in a building off Dewey Square in Boston. His death at age 21 cut the heart out of the Wright family. Also in April 1889 Henry Winsor of Philadelphia, formerly of Duxbury, left the town \$5,000 in order to establish a library. In October 1889 the Wright family gave their former guest house and three-eighths of an acre of land for the "Duxbury Free Library," to become a memorial to their son George.

For the next 17 years, from 1890-1907, this hip-roofed house was Duxbury's first library building, on the site of today's Wright building.

The library was originally open two afternoons a week and was entirely furnished by bequests from various Wright family members. An 1893 Boston newspaper described the library as "a plain enough building, which the stranger may readily mistake for an inn. About the library are many leafy elms which add shade and a touch of rustic beauty."

In 1907 Georgianna Wright, George's mother, having suffered more deaths of family members, offered to build a new substantial library as a permanent memorial to her family. This became the 1909 Wright building. She also offered the old wooden library as a town office if it was moved off the site. An underlying motive might also have been to keep the town from encroaching on the new building with offices as town government expanded. The town bought the "Loring lot" and in 1908 moved the building to its present site at 178 St. George St. The building served as the Town Offices for almost 70 years until the current Town Office building was built in 1975. The first library building was then sold and is now offices and apartments.

As Duxbury faces into the future of the 1909 Wright building, perhaps the history of the first library is a good lesson in adaptability. From honeymoon house to town offices, from library to private home, this building reflects Duxbury's past as its use continued to change with the needs of the town.